THREE

DISCOURSES:

TWO

Againſt LUXURY and DISSIPATION.

ONE

On UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE.

BY

PERCIVAL STOCKDALE.

LONDON:

Printed for W. FLEXNEY, oppoſite Gray's-Inn-Gate, Holborn.

M. DCC. LXXIII.

TWO DISCOURSES:

EXODUS xxiii. 2.

Thou ſhalt not follow a Multitude to do Evil.

THE effect of mimickry is to excite our contempt and laughter; and yet the generality of mankind, with all their aſſumed gravity and importance, are from the cradle to the grave only mimicks one of another. The weakeſt man is apt to be vain of his underſtanding; and you could not affront him more than by telling him that he had not the uſe of reaſon. Yet certain it is, that though Providence hath implanted in our frame that diſtinguiſhing faculty, which, by proper cultivation, would produce the moſt ſalutary, the moſt noble fruits; by far the greater part of us neglect the improvement of that beſt endowment of our nature; we let it ſhoot into a rank luxuriance, or it dies in a total ſterility.

To give an inſtance of this fatal inattention, (which of all other inſtances I ſhould wiſh it were not in my power to give). Irreligion, I thank God, is not

yet become univerſal: there are many who have not yet bowed the knee to Baal; who have not yet diſclaimed the Chriſtian faith, and eſpouſed all the licentiouſneſs of the times. Is it not evident from the conduct of the profeſſors of Chriſtianity in general, however irreproachable they may think their lives to be, that they have not *ſtudied* their religion, which is addreſſed to them as rational creatures? But that they have received it implicitly, as it was conveyed to them through the medium of gloomy bigotry, or fanatical enthuſiaſm? The conſequences of this corrupt initiation, which they never ſit down ſeriouſly to revolve, and to reform, are a miſtaken mode of action, and, at beſt, a partial obedience.

The truth is (however ſevere it may ſeem to declare it) we too commonly adopt a certain form of worſhip, as we adopt a general manner of living, from the authority of cuſtom, not from impartial reflection, and the ſacred approbation of reaſon. Our piety goes little farther: we ſtrictly obſerve times, and ſeaſons, and rites, and ceremonies; but we neglect the practice of the moral and excellent precepts of our religion; we are more jealous of its vehicles than tenacious of its ſubſtance.

If this was not the caſe, would not Chriſtianity work more vigorous effects in the human mind? would

would not our lives correſpond with the code by which we pretend they are governed? with thoſe laws, which, if ſtrenuouſly obeyed, would bring us near perfection, which prohibit every vice, and inculcate every virtue?

Our Saviour warns us againſt taking our faith upon truſt; againſt heedleſsly embracing any tenet of any ſect, or perſuaſion. He bids us ſearch the ſcriptures; and, like a divine reaſoner, he enforces his injunction by the ſtrongeſt motive that could be advanced. "For in *them*, ſays he, ye think ye have "eternal life." What book ſhould we read ſo carefully and ſo often as that which ſhews us the way to immortal happineſs?

This inſtance of our ſuperficiality in religious matters, of our imitation of a thoughtleſs and precipitate world, is intimately connected with my text, though it was only meant as an introduction to a more cloſe conſideration of it. For it ſhews you one abſurdity of a *multitude* which leads to great and complicated *evil*.

Thou ſhalt not follow a multitude to do evil. The propriety of the prohibition is clear and undeniable, as ſoon as it is read. Some inconſiderate and raſh infidels (and inconſiderate and raſh moſt infidels are)

object to many of the precepts of our religion, that the ſubſtance of them is ſo plain, and obtrudes itſelf ſo forcibly upon the mind, that it is abſurd to ſuppoſe them divine commands. Their objection proves what they attempt to diſprove. The correſpondence of Chriſtian morality with the genuine dictates of conſcience, with the ſimple uſe of common reaſon, argues its celeſtial origin. Some parts, indeed, of the Chriſtian ſyſtem of morals are more refined than any tenets of the heathen philoſophers. But how more refined? Not in abſtruſeneſs, but in purity. On an eaſy examination, they equally gain the aſſent of the heart and the head with our other ſacred rules for the conduct of life, which had been preſcribed to mankind before the Chriſtian diſpenſation. The practical religion of Chriſt is addreſſed to common ſenſe, to all mankind; and that is one proof that it came from God. Thoſe maxims of the law and the goſpel, which, we may ſay, contain ſelf-evident truths, were worthy of divine injunction; for the obſervance of them conduces much to the happineſs of man --- of man, a frail and perverſe creature, who often acts in oppoſition to his moſt palpable conviction; who needs every day to be reminded of his cleareſt duty, and to have it inforced by the moſt awful authority.

If the Chriſtian inſtitution had recommended many paradoxes to our practice, ingenious and ſubtle propoſitions, fit to amuſe the tedious hours of the idle, and to ſharpen the penetration of the acute, we might with ſome reaſon have diſputed the divine miſſion of its author.

You will agree, then, that we ſhould not follow a multitude to do evil.

I ſhall beg your attention while I point out to you ſome public evils which are very prevalent in theſe times, and while I endeavour to ſhew you their deſtructive tendency. The principal objects of my diſcourſe ſhall be, diſſipation and licentiouſneſs: they have now got to an enormous growth amongſt us; they are the character of the age. A diſcuſſion of them will certainly be very pertinent to my text, for they are great evils, of which a multitude are guilty.

There is no acquiſition for which mankind are ſo ardent and ſollicitous as wealth. It is eaſy to account for this eager purſuit. Nothing appears ſo eligible as wealth to ſlight obſervation, and by example and ſuperficial thought our conduct is generally determined. Wealth is a copious ſource of power: it ſubjects to us all the arts of convenience, magnifi-

cence, and pleaſure; it ſooths and heals ſickneſs; it enlivens and exhilarates health; it commands, at leaſt, an apparent and a very flattering veneration, though it be accompanied neither with ſenſe, nor virtue. The world bows before it; every one flies to accommodate, to oblige, to ſerve the poſſeſſor of wealth: By his faſcinating taliſman he enjoys all the beſt effects of friendſhip, without having, perhaps, one ſincere friend. As to ſincere friends, he who has one (be he rich or poor) is more fortunate than many of his neighbours: but the rich man, of all others, needs them leaſt.

It is not ſurprizing that theſe glowing ideas inflame the human mind with a paſſion for riches: yet the common abuſe of them, one would think, might abate this fervour.

Would to God! ſays the poor man (circumſcribed in his pleaſures by poverty, and obliged to labour for the ſupport of his family), would to God! I were rich, for then I ſhould live as I pleaſed: the *very conſequence* of affluence which would make a thinking and truly conſiderate man indifferent about it, which would make him fear and tremble when it flowed upon him.

Let us not compliment human nature at the expence of truth: by far the greater number of thoſe who

who lead moral lives, owe their good habits to fear, to caution, to prudence; not to the vigorous influence of generous sentiments. Most of us are restrained from evil, and impelled to good, by palpable and selfish considerations; by a regard to interest; to the opinion of the world; by a dread of the punishments denounced against vice by human and divine laws. I mean not to throw contempt on these objects, which the wisest and best men will always regard, and which very forcibly controul our degenerate nature. I would only observe, that the truly virtuous man, he, whose moral and religious conduct is animated and ennobled by an ardent love of virtue and religion, is a rare character.

The conduct of the generality of good men is modelled by the restrictions which I have just mentioned; but those restrictions are despised by the rich man. He may be prodigal of his time and his money without hurting his interest, without forfeiting that independence which money gives: as to the respect of the world, he is sure to enjoy it as long as the splendour of wealth beams around him; unless he stains his character with repeated, with continued acts of the blackest and most notorious infamy. The fear of the Deity is soon banished by the presumption and intoxication inspired by affluence. Human laws allow him a wide field to range in: he may be extremely

tremely profligate, and yet do nothing illegal; or, if he violates the laws of his country, he may elude their puniſhment, or pervert their application. Let us take a view of the conduct of the rich, and we ſhall ſee that they arrogate privileges, which precipitate them to the moſt abject ſlavery.

We have naturally a great averſion from induſtry manual, or intellectual; and yet that induſtry, to which the greater part of mankind are obliged to have recourſe for their ſupport, when we are familiarized to it by habit, yields one of the pureſt and livelieſt pleaſures of which we are ſuſceptible: the proſecution of it palls not, though often repeated; and the reflecting on it gives a rational ſatisfaction, and ſelf-congratulation.

But the rich man miſtakes his happineſs. Diſſolved in indolence and luxury, he cannot endure that activity of body and mind which preſerve the health of the animal machine, and of the immaterial principle; which enſure the well-being of the man. His enjoyments are ſuch as he would be aſhamed of, if he could reflect; procured merely by the accidental power of money; not by vigorous qualities inherent in himſelf; not by generous induſtry, and ardour. But do ſuch enjoyments, when we make them our ſole objects, deſerve the name?

No,

No; they will never engroſs the human mind without rendering it unhappy. The poſſeſſor of them depends hourly upon externals for his pleaſures, and therefore, with all the ſecurity which he derives from his wealth, he muſt often meet with excruciating diſappointments. Suppoſe, that, by ſome unforeſeen accident, he is deprived of one of thoſe auxiliaries of life, when he is eagerly anticipating the poſſeſſion of it, what ſource of ſatisfaction has he within himſelf to be cheared with in its ſtead? To keep his mind in play, he has always had recourſe to externals; therefore his mind, without them, in its beſt ſtate, is dormant and vapid; but in this caſe it is ſoured, fermented, and violently agitated with diſappointment and chagrin; this agitation and pain are ſucceeded by a ſickening languor, and a horrible void.

The periſhable nature of his pleaſures cauſes daily uneaſineſs and mutability of mind. The gratification of his ſenſes is his great perſuit; and the high zeſt of ſenſual delights is loſt by repeating them immoderately. He only enjoys them perfectly who enjoys them with œconomy.

Our animal and intellectual gratifications are as different as our ideas of matter and ſpirit. The exceſs of the ſenſualiſt is always counteracting his aim:

his miſtaken and intemperate perſuit of happineſs is ever impairing his joys, and augmenting that miſery with which debauchery is, *in this world*, conſtantly puniſhed. His deſires grow more ardent; his ſenſations more dull and languid. His fever for pleaſure is gaining new ſtrength; his enjoyments are loſing their poignancy. Till, at length, he arrives at the hell of Plato; a continual tantalization; an importunate and excruciating paſſion for delights which elude his graſp; a thirſt perpetually increaſing, becauſe never allayed. We may make a ſimilar remark on leſs violent pleaſures, on light amuſements, on gaiety, and magnificence. The ſplendid trifles have a lively effect upon us at firſt;—throw minds which are not accuſtomed to them, into ecſtacy. The unthinking croud, who view their glitter at a diſtance, envy their poſſeſſors, and raſhly complain of the unequal diſtribution of human felicity.

But happily for virtue, and for man, they are miſtaken. The taliſman is ſoon broken, and the charm is diſſolved. Elegance and grandeur, all the arts of luxury and refinement, are indifferent to habituated ſenſe and fancy. It is novelty alone which recommends trifling, and tranſitory externals; thoſe contingent and adſcititious poſſeſſions, of which a wiſe man never feels the want; which are not inherent,

and

and indeprivable; and in which our permanent and eternal happineſs is not at all concerned. Their inſufficiency to give durable ſatisfaction, is proved by the mutability and inquietude of their followers; who are always eager after a change of amuſement, always, like the idle Athenians, inquiring for ſomething new.

The ſenſibility of the affluent and the gay to external pleaſures, might, indeed, be kept alive, if they had the art of contraſting ſituations, of frequently ſubſtituting abſtemiouſneſs for luxury, the plain fare, and the ruſtic jeſt of the peaſant for the delicate intercourſe of polite ſociety. But they have not ſenſe, reflection, and philoſophy enough to adopt this prudent œconomy.

After a view of this mortifying conduct of man, to caſt an eye on the reverſe of the melancholy ſcene, to take a ſurvey of the pleaſures of reaſon and religion, will give us moral conſolation, and reconcile us to human nature.

Theſe pleaſures, in one of their effects, operate upon the mind like thoſe of ſenſe and diſſipation: the more we are habituated to them, the more we deſire them: but as the deſire, which increaſes as

we perſue them, proceeds from reaſon and ſound judgment, it imbibes their qualities. It is gentle, and ſerene; it is ſubject to no rude agitations, to no anxiety, nor remorſe. The ſoul feels it with a ſedate triumph; it rejoices in the objects of its choice. This deſire, and the enjoyments to which it aſpires, keep the body and mind in ſound and perfect health, and draw forth all that is amiable, beautiful, and reſpectable in man: they conſtitute the higheſt improvement of his nature; they are the bloſſom of his exiſtence. By them we acquire what we ſuppoſe are the properties of ſuperiour beings; a ſteddy, and uniform perſuit of the nobleſt objects; that complacency, that ſufficient happineſs which a worthy and generous mode of acting, and the review of it affords;--- pure emotions, and ecſtaſies, which, as they are the reſult of rectitude, the overflowing of ingenuous, and ethereal ſentiment, are active, and vigorous, without impetuoſity; they enliven and exalt, without diſcompoſing; their tone is a happy medium betwixt that indolence which deadens, and that mental fermentation which diſturbs, and alarms.

By this habitude we conſpire as effectually as we can, with the merits of Chriſt, to renew the original dignity of human nature, to reſtore the defaced image of God. I ſpeak with an humble ſenſe of the beſt efforts of man when compared with the powerful redemption

redemption of the Meſſiah, with an awful veneration of the infinite attributes of the Supreme Being, to which the perfections of our firſt parents, even before the fall, muſt have borne a very faint reſemblance.

I have hitherto exemplified the folly, and the great evils of luxury, parade, and diſſipation, by laying before you the conduct of the rich. Too much incenſe is offered at the ſhrine of mammon; the ſervile knee is too often bent before him: but when we endeavour to evince, and inculcate important, and ſacred truth, it is frequently our indiſpenſable duty to break down the arbitrary pale of ceremonies, and to explore, with an unprejudiced eye, the ground which is hallowed, by the abſurdity of cuſtom. I have choſen to exhibit the characters of the rich, becauſe in them the vices, of which I propoſed to ſhow the ruinous tendency, are moſt prevalent and conſpicuous.

Indeed, if we could only impute luxury, and diſſipation to people of fortune, who, in every country, are by far the ſmaller number, my text would not have been applicable to the ſubject which I have choſen to diſcuſs. But theſe vices have, in this age, infected every ſtation. There are many impudent, and idle beggars in this metropolis, who deſpiſe ſuch

humble fare as is moſt ſuitable to their miſerable manner of ſubſiſting; ſuch as merely ſatisfies nature, and preſerves health. They are not content without their elegancies.

I propoſe the next opportunity to give you my remaining thoughts on the moſt momentous objects that can be preſented to the mind of man. I ſhall cloſe this diſcourſe by recommending one conſideration to your frequent and ſerious review; a conſiſideration which is alone ſufficient to guard a good heart againſt an expenſive, and diſſolute life.

Luxury and diſſipation deſtroy practical and active benevolence; for they multiply our wants to an immeaſurable number; and the more we want, the leſs we ſhall beſtow. Self-love will ever be the predominant principle of human nature; and while from the ſordid mind it ſhoots to a narrow circle, and aims merely at the gratification of the Individual; in the wiſe and good man it reſembles the great luminary of heaven; it warms and enlivens the world. His ſelf-love receives its moſt exquiſite pleaſure, when he befriends mankind, whom he deems his brethren; when he ſooths the pains, or participates the joys of his fellow-creatures.

God

God forbid that we ſhould ever adopt a mode of conduct which would deprive us of philanthropy, our nobleſt ornament; which would render us far inferiour, in the generous affections, to the animals of more limited capacities; many of whom, the pride of man hath ſet at too great a diſtance from him in the ſcale of creation.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE II.

Againſt LUXURY, and DISSIPATION.

DISCOURSE II.

Against LUXURY, and DISSIPATION.

EXODUS xxiii. 2.

Thou ſhalt not follow a Multitude to do Evil.

TO contraſt the mean objects which unhappily attract the majority of mankind, and to make them appear as contemptible as they really are, I intend, in this diſcourſe, more particularly to deſcribe the pleaſures which we enjoy by a conduct, with which the perſuit of *them* is incompatible; by the exerciſe of our underſtanding, and by the practice of virtue. And I ſhall conclude with as accurate and lively a compariſon as I am able to make, of the lives of the diſſolute, and good man.

There is ſome phyſical, but no moral analogy, between the pleaſures of ſenſe and thoſe of intellect. An intemperate perſuit of knowledge fatigues, and hurts the mind, as exceſs in animal gratifications harraſſes and injures the body. Our faculties are ſuſceptible of a variety of enjoyments, within the bounds of innocence and virtue; and theſe enjoyments, by the providential arrangement of the Deity,

are acceſſible almoſt to every good man. To take them moderately, and alternately, with a due regard to the frame of human nature, which will not bear to be fixed long to one object; with a due regard to our own particular habit of body and mind, and to our circumſtances and ſituation; is an arduous, and important acquiſition in practical philoſophy. That we ſhould perſue nothing too much, is an ancient and obvious rule; but it is uſeful and ſalutary; it ſhould always influence the conduct of our lives. It is much neglected by a certain claſs of the learned, by thoſe who boaſt a ſuperiority of reaſon, an exertion of our nobleſt powers: their immenſe reading, undigeſted by vigorous thinking, produces a confuſed maſs of ideas. A ſedentary life, and a literary intoxication indiſpoſe their animal and intellectual conſtitutions. They hurt themſelves, and they are uſeleſs to ſociety. If ſcholaſtic pride was not the moſt abſurd, untractable, and arrogant quality in the world, one might convince them, that they ſhould ſtudy in a different manner, or not ſtudy at all.

But theſe are phlegmatic and dull mortals. They bring no imputation on a liberal and judicious exerciſe of our intellectual faculties, which is a great ornament and honour to mankind. Every literary man, whoſe ſtudies are conducted by reaſon and taſte, muſt be

be ſenſible, from experience, that the application of his mental abilities invigorates the body, as well as the mind. This may ſeem a paradox to thoſe who have not been habituated to that cloſe attention which learning requires, and who have often heard, that an ardent perſuit of knowledge exhauſts the ſpirits, and impairs the conſtitution. But, like many other paradoxes, it will be found, on examination, to be indubitably true. * A great genius hath aſſerted, that cloſe and complicated thinking is not natural to man. It will be difficult to comprehend, how the exertion of a capacity implanted in us by the author of nature, is unnatural; of which exertion many glorious monuments exiſt, which improve and ennoble human nature, and, under the auſpices of virtue, greatly augment our happineſs.

There is a conſtant communication and ſympathy betwixt the ſoul and body, the inmoſt ſprings of which will never be diſcovered by the moſt inquiſitive and penetrating philoſopher. The exerciſe of the powers of the mind, however intenſe, if not protracted too long, by a ſecret, but certain operation, increaſes the vigour and activity of the animal organs: it whets the appetite, animates the countenance, and diffuſes health, and vivacity over the whole frame.

* Naturellement l'Homme ne penſe guéres. ROUSSEAU.

The ſtate of mind of the collected and reaſoning, and that of the diſſipated and ſenſual man, are always as different as their perſuits. He who cultivates his underſtanding, by being habituated to call forth its powers, feels no repugnance to ſtudy, no pain in proſecuting his inquiries; but, on the contrary, a lively and refined pleaſure. He riſes from the feaſt of reaſon ſatisfied, but not cloyed; regaled with entertaining and intereſting images, with the diſcovery of important truth, with the excurſions and atchievements of the ſoul. Conſcience, by her ſacred verdict, approves the calm, but pleaſing reflection, and completes his enjoyment.

His vacant hours yield him a manly and rational delight. Regulated by a calm, yet active habit of mind, they are not devoted to extravagance, immorality, and riotous mirth, but to a temperate gratification of ſenſe, and to a humane and inſtructive intercourſe with his friends. Relaxation, conſidered merely as a contraſt to ſtudy, is attended with ſweet and lively feelings, which like other fine ſenſations, it is difficult adequately to deſcribe, and which the indolent never experience. Man is ſo conſtituted, that his life ſtagnates, and corrupts, unleſs it is kept in moderate agitation by a prudent variety. The cheering light of the ſun, and the gay bloom, and aromatic

aromatic fragrance of the ſpring, derive much of their exhilarating influence from their oppoſites, darkneſs, and winter. I repeat the warning, becauſe it is much neglected, and becauſe a proper attention to it would prevent many inconveniences, many phyſical, and moral evils.

I have already taken a view of the life of the debauchee: yet let us, in a few words, oppoſe it to *that* of our intellectual hero. The exiſtence of the voluptuary owes all its active enjoyments to animal impulſe, to the impreſſion of violent pleaſures. His feſtal hours, however replete they may ſeem with triumphant, and riotous joy, are interſperſed with ſober, and ſevere moments. Conſcience takes her ſtand near Circè, and embitters the cup of the alluring ſorcereſs. His mirth, and his raptures may, with ſome propriety be compared to flaſhes of lightning burſting from a troubled atmoſphere; — they certainly bear no reſemblance to the ſteddy rays of the ſun illuminating the pure concave of an azure ſky.

But what reflecting man, for the tumultuous pleaſures of the ſenſualiſt, would endure his unactive hours; in which he is either ſtung with the agony of remorſe, or ſunk in a tremulous dejection of ſpirits, more horrible than death?

I hope

I hope you will not think my deſcription of intellectual happineſs impertinently digreſſive, and inconſiſtent with my ſubject; as the cultivation of our rational, and immortal principle, when our ſtation admits it, muſt be pleaſing in the ſight of God --- as it enlarges, and ſtrengthens piety, when it operates on a good heart --- and as the natural, and immediate conſequence of it, is, a moderate, and chaſtiſed indulgence in ſenſual pleaſures, and in trifling amuſements.

But virtue, when we are inured to the practice of it, is ſo congenial with our nature, that it is exerciſed with an eaſy, with a ſpontaneous volition. As it ſhould regulate the whole ſtrain of our conduct, it is in a moment called forth to action. As it is incomparably the beſt of human poſſeſſions, it may be acquired by people of all ſtations, and capacities. Time, and the other requiſites to a great proficiency in knowledge, are granted but to a few; ---- and genius is the endowment of yet a ſmaller number. But a man in the moſt humble ſphere of life, and of the moſt bounded capacity, may be an adept in virtue. Its path is injoined, and pointed out to him by the loweſt degree of ſentiment, and reaſon. He hath free acceſs to the oracles of God; and if he pays proper attention to their clear, and infallible precepts,

precepts, he will perſue the ſacred way without any deviation.

That knowledge, and riches, if well applied, are productive of happineſs, is a ſelf-evident propoſition. But that both are generally abuſed by the infirmity, and perverſeneſs of human nature, is likewiſe a truth, which needs no gradual demonſtration. Yet though they afford a variety of pleaſures, when honeſtly, and judiciouſly directed, the virtuous, and pious man is happy without *them*, and without any fortuitous acquiſition. None are ſo ſecure as he, of health, and a competence through life; as none are ſo well entitled to theſe invaluable bleſſings. If we take into the eſtimate of his character, the vigour, and exertion of a virtuous mind, (for virtue rightly underſtood, is the very reverſe of inactivity, and languor,) --- and if we add to our account, the ſerenity and luſtre of his reflecting hours, ---- the calm of reſignation, and the ſilent, but emphatical gratulations of his own heart, the ſunſhine of conſcience; and the animating proſpect of eternal happineſs; --- I ſhould be glad to know what this man wants, or if he is not the moſt angelical being that can be exemplified on earth. Surely he has employment, and pleaſure enough to keep his exiſtence from dozing. Surely he needs not envy

 the

the philoſopher who multiplies ideas, nor the man of the world who accumulates wealth.

We are cheated out of the true enjoyment of life by the faſcination of externals. The juſt, and benign Author of nature, hath providentially conſtituted ſuch a harmony between the frame of man, and the world in which he dwells, that it is in our power, to make even our probationary exiſtence, with all its viciſſitudes, a ſtate, in which pleaſure ſhall be greatly predominant over pain. But we try not the objects that ſurround us by the teſt of reaſon; we are the dupes of imagination, of caprice, and of mode. We are ſo far ſeduced from nature, and a proper uſe of our underſtanding, by our own childiſh propenſities, by ſplendour, and by FASHION, the moſt unſtable, and deſpicable of all authorities, that we abſurdly affix to whatever is glittering, and expenſive, the idea of ſupreme felicity. Regardleſs of ſubſtantial, and valuable objects, we eagerly purſue gaudy, and deluſive meteors, which often hurry us to the gulph of ruin. We frame not our mode of living by the examples of philoſophers --- (by philoſophers I mean not thoſe who are converſant in many moral ſyſtems, but thoſe who practiſe virtue in her native plainneſs, and purity, with undaunted fortitude, and unremitting perſeverence) --- we mo-

de-

del not our lives by the conduct of theſe reſpectable ſages, but by the fantaſtic, and licentious extravagancies of people of quality, whom Reaſon, however they are idolized by abject ſycophants, when ſhe is unfolding important, immutable, and eternal truth, muſt pronounce to be, in general, the moſt contemptible of the human ſpecies.

Againſt ſuch precedents, nature, virtue, and religion exclaim with united voice. True happineſs, to men in humble ſtations, reſults from a ſteddy perſuit of their calling, with honeſty, ſobriety, and integrity. The happineſs of perſons in a more elevated ſphere, whoſe education hath been enlarged, and whoſe fortune is affluent, ariſes from an attachment to thoſe rational, and manly occupations, and pleaſures, which always lie within the circle of their own power, which may be perſued without a combination of many external, and accidental circumſtances. I ſhould be ſorry to be thought a moroſe, and ſevere dictator. For virtue is cheerful, amiable, and attractive. She witholds not the elegancies of life from thoſe who can afford to enjoy them. But ſhe injoins a moderate participation of them; for if we uſe them temperately, they embelliſh, and refine, if intemperately, they corrupt, and deform the mind.

Suppoſe a man born to affluence, virtuouſly, and liberally educated, and long habituated to the noble objects which have been inculcated. --- Suppoſe him uniformly moving in his exalted ſphere --- *keeping himſelf unſpotted from the world, and viſiting the fatherleſs, and widows in their affliction* --- or ſuppoſe him improving his intellectual faculties, intent on the acquiſition of knowledge --- or take a view of him in his hours of relaxation, when in ſome ſacred grove he is unbending his mind, without ſuffering it to be totally unſtrung --- contemplating the bloom of nature, and looking up to its author with pious gratitude, and rapture --- after you have ſurveyed this auguſt character, whoſe very amuſements, as they are inſpired by virtue, ſtrengthen, and confirm her influence, would not your contempt, or pity be excited, if I ſhould bring to your obſervation thoſe wretched mortals, whom the laws of ſociety denominate our ſuperiours, and who are ſo unworthy of the reſpectable ſtation which Providence hath aſſigned them --- whoſe principal buſineſs, is, the infamous trade at ARTHUR's, and whoſe higheſt pleaſure, is, the low buffoonery of a maſquerade --- who paſs their happieſt hours under the auſpices of CORNELLIS?

Surely if a man was ſatisfied that a particular mode of conduct would make him happier than any other,

other, he would adopt it without delay, and adhere to it through life. And that *virtue alone is happineſs below*, is not merely a poetical aſſertion, but as rigidly true as an axiom in geometry. Why then do the follies, and vices of a frivolous, and abandoned age, engroſs the minds, not only of the *great vulgar, and the ſmall*, but even of men diſtinguiſhed by their capacities, and attainments, from whom we might expect a better choice? why, but becauſe they examine every queſtion more accurately than *that*, on which their durable happineſs, their chief good depends? They exert not reaſon on the moſt important inquiry; they are implicitly miſled by ſenſe, and paſſion; they are deluded by volatile, and glaring phantoms. They are not induſtrious to know themſelves, to probe the conſtitution of the human mind. If they gave due attention to this uſeful ſtudy, they would ſoon learn to diſcriminate ſplendour from ſubſtance; and they would act agreeably to their moral conviction. Mankind, though reaſonable beings, are ſo unaccountably the ſlaves of caprice, and fancy, that we may juſtly exclaim, with the ſage author of Eccleſiaſticus --- *O imagination, whence cameſt thou in, to cover the earth with deceit?* Eccleſiaſticus, chap. xxxvii. 3. --- And when we reflect on their ignorance of thoſe things, which make for their temporal, and eternal peace, we may, with equal propriety,

ty, apply to them the words, in which the prophet Jeremiah reproved the Jews of old --- *Surely theſe are poor, they are fooliſh; for they* KNOW *not the way of the Lord, nor the judgement of their God.* Jer. chap. v. 4.

Let the imaginary lords of the creation paſs in review before us --- They who are *cloathed in purple, and fine linen, and fare ſumptuouſly every day*; --- whom all the arts of luxury, and refinement are aſſiduous to gratify; --- who are attended by a train of obſequious, and ſplendid ſlaves; --- who have their magnificent palaces in town, and their delightful villas, in which, one might ſuppoſe, they would find a terreſtrial Elyſium.

If we view theſe factitious demi-gods with a keen, and impartial eye, undazzled with the rays of grandeur, and penetrating its object, we ſhall find that they are leſs happy than the ruſtic farmer, with his home-ſpun coat, and his roſy face, the image of health and peace. I will yet deſcend lower in the ſcale of humanity: I will venture to aſſert, that they are, in general, not ſo happy as thoſe who are deſtined by fortune to the moſt ſervile employments; thoſe, whom the great, and their inſolent domeſticks deem the outcaſts of mankind, and ſuffer not to enter

ter their houſes, leſt they ſhould be polluted by their preſence.

Look into their coaches; he that runs may read the moral lecture; for its characters are bold, and prominent. You may ſee my theory verified without inſulting them by a long, and impudent ſtare. Are their complexions fluſhed with the healthy bloom of the peaſant? --- Doth ſerenity open their countenances? --- Doth pleaſure ſparkle in their eyes? --- No; --- they have none of theſe marks of a ſound body and mind. They are commonly bloated, or emaciated with diſeaſe. Their aſpects betray the turbulent brood of ungoverned paſſions which harraſs, and diſtract their ſouls. *There* ſullen pride, ſordid envy, and pale chagrin, with other tormentors, created, and nouriſhed by themſelves, have impreſſed the outward ſigns of their inward tyranny; --- ſigns of extreme, and irremediable miſery, which, like the mark ſet on Cain by the Almighty, warn judicious malice, though it may be impelled beyond the fear of human, and divine laws, not to kill them. For their moſt implacable, and daring enemies, if they reflect on their diſtreſsful condition, will certainly wiſh them to live.

Let us turn away from this mortifying ſpectacle, and enter the humble roof of a virtuous, and religious

gious pair, who are poor in the language of the exchange, but rich in the eſtimate of reaſon. They have *food to eat, and raiment to put on.* They are happy in the conſciouſneſs of diligence, and integrity, and in the inexpreſſible pleaſure of a chaſte, and affectionate union; a pleaſure too pure, and too exquiſite for language to paint.

They are happy in rearing a little family after their own model, in having been inſtrumental to the exiſtence of rational, and immortal beings, born, like themſelves, to virtue, and its eternal rewards. --- What can the well-regulated nature of man require more?

The labour of the day being over, they crown their evening with a plain, but grateful repaſt. They need no arts of cookery, no poignant ſauces; for they ſit down to their frugal meal with health, appetite, and content.

An innocent, a lively, and ſentimental converſation ſucceeds, which Chriſt, were he on earth, would ſanctify with his preſence, and approbation. They review the paternal care with which they have been favoured by Providence, from their birth to their preſent happy hour. The idea thrills, and dilates their hearts. Their eyes gliſten with a pious tear,

the

the conſequence of active and ſublime feelings, to which the joys of the voluptuary are a vapid, a dead contraſt. The moral electricity runs through the family, and ſtrikes even the young minds of immature ſenſibility.

I will not divert the impreſſion, which, I hope, this inſtructive imagery will make, by farther argument, or deſcription. The truth of the picture will ſupply the defects of its execution.

I have endeavoured to ſhow, (and, I flatter myſelf, I have evinced) that miſery is the certain conſequence of luxury, and diſſipation, and that their oppoſite, virtue, is the moſt prudent, as well as the nobleſt conduct; and that were we only to exiſt in this tranſitory ſtate, we ſhould adhere to it, from policy. For it gives us health of body, peace of mind, lively, and durable enjoyment, and keeps us independent of a changeable, and inhuman world.

May we never follow the unthinking *multitude to do evil*; but may we, with the virtuous, and religious few, always *be followers of that which is good.*

DISCOURSE III.

On UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE.

1 CORINTH. xiii. 13.

—— *Now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, theſe Three; but the greateſt of theſe is Charity.*

THE ſhort, but moſt important chapter, from which I have taken theſe words, is an encomium upon charity. And from the high preeminence which the apoſtle gives it above all other endowments, above the moſt heroic actions we can atchieve, we may venture to term it the Subſtance of true religion, a ſhort definition of Chriſtianity.

St. Paul inſiſts chiefly upon its generous and beneficent effects, --- upon its diffuſive influence, --- and upon its duration.

As the apoſtle here recommends charity with ſo much warmth, and earneſtneſs, we may, with probability conjecture, that the church of Corinth payed more regard to the eloquence of the pulpit, and to the mere inſtrumental, and temporary powers with which Chriſtians were endowed in thoſe early days,

ſuch as the gift of tongues, and prophecy, than to this indiſpenſable, and moſt amiable virtue. They were more tenacious, perhaps, of a *zeal without knowledge*, than of a mild, and benevolent conduct, without which an attachment to religion is only bigotry, madneſs, and inhumanity.

This diſpoſition is not peculiar to the time when St. Paul wrote his epiſtle, nor to the people to whom it was addreſſed. Chriſtians of every age and nation have too commonly been more obſervant of the appendages, than of the eſſentials of Chriſtianity. A miſconduct which we may as often reſolve into the moral depravity, as into the fallibility of human nature. We find it much eaſier to go to church, to join in the public worſhip there, and to receive the ſacrament at the ſtated times, than induſtriouſly to relieve the indigent, and to forgive injuries. Though nothing is more difficult than to reconcile a punctuality in religious externals, and a neglect of religious precepts in the tenour of our lives, with the real duty of a rational creature. The word, difficult, indeed, in this caſe, ſhould not be applied. It is impoſſible to make uniformity of inconſiſtency. To be merely devout, without aiming at purity of heart, and moral conduct, is to act in contradiction to the plaineſt dictates of common ſenſe, and to the

moſt

moſt obvious, and conſtant tendency of the goſpel. It is the moſt preſumptuous irreverence to God, and the baſeſt prevarication with man.

St. Paul obſerves to the Corinthians, that they ought not to lay too great a ſtreſs on the knowledge of languages, and the gift of prophecy. They were only to be conſidered as temporary, and partial means to propagate, and ratify thoſe practical doctrines which, when adopted into life, confer happineſs and ſalvation on mankind. They were to be attended to, and revered as inſtruments made uſe of by Providence to diffuſe, and enforce his laws; but they were not to be deemed the diſtinguiſhing privileges, the inherent, invariable, and univerſal characteriſticks of the profeſſors of Chriſtianity. By facility in a particular tongue we can only impart inſtruction to a particular diſtrict of people: the miraculous gift of many tongues, which was beſtowed of old, was reſtrained to its proper times, and places: and the prophecies, which were uttered in thoſe days, were principally directed to immediate exigencies. --- We are likewiſe told in this chapter, that the moſt extenſive knowledge we are capable of attaining in this life, is imperfect and temporary: it is to the clearer, and more enlarged views which a future and exalted ſtate will give us, what the dim

reflexion

reflexion of an object from a mirror is to the distinct perception of the object itself. So limited are our faculties, and the improvement of them here, that these faculties, and this improvement shall be quite lost, and annihilated in our free, intuitive capacities, and in the new, and unbounded scenes, which hereafter shall engage their attention.

But we learn from the apostle's arguments, that charity, as it may be practiced on earth, is of a very different nature from the other gifts, and acquirements which he mentions. It is a virtue of infinite latitude; it is accommodated to all times, and nations: every one ought to be possessed of it, and exercise it to every one. With all the infirmity of our present state, we may make our charity so active, and universal, we may bring it so near perfection, that a small improvement will make it complete in a better world. For charity, says St. Paul, never faileth. --- It will certainly be worth our pains carefully to examine the nature, and seriously to determine on the practice of a virtue, which is so strongly enjoyned us by scripture, and by which we may acquire an angelic temper of mind before we die.

The apostle having shown the superlative excellence of charity, and the inferiority of the other gifts, and acquisitions; their partial worth, and occasional

caſional application, concludes the chapter with the words which I have choſen for my text. --- " And " now abideth faith, hope, charity, theſe three; " but the greateſt of theſe is charity."

As if he had ſaid --- " It is not in the power " of every one to ſupply the neceſſities of the poor; " nor is it required of every one to die a martyr to " religion. The gift of tongues is granted but to " a few; and it is granted for a particular purpoſe; " to ſpread, and eſtabliſh the doctrines of the goſpel. " It is not an indiſpenſable mark of a Chriſtian; " nor will it ſubſiſt in every age of Chriſtianity. " Your knowledge, too, of things human, and di- " vine, is extremely deficient; but for that deficiency " you will not be called to account; it is inſuper- " able, from your nature. But enough is revealed to " you by the indulgence of heaven, to confirm your " faith, to enliven your hope, and to expand your " charity. Theſe properties *now abide* with the " diſciples of Chriſt; they are neceſſary, and fixed " principles with every Chriſtian; they are riveted, " and immoveable in his mind; they actuate all his " conduct, during the ſtate of his mortal probation. " By them he *makes his calling, and election ſure.* " They are not of a local, and temporary nature; " they muſt characterize every true member of the

" church of God, of every nation, and of every age,
" to the end of the world."

Let us now take a view of the three Chriſtian graces, *faith*, *hope*, and *charity*.

Faith, though its meaning is generally confined to the belief of revealed religion, may yet admit of a more comprehenſive ſignification; it may likewiſe imply the belief of any material fact, of which we have not mathematical demonſtration, or which falls not under the perception of our ſenſes.

Let us obſerve, now, how powerfully this aſſent operates, when it is fully given to any object which is preſented to the mind. We firmly believe that there was a Socrates, and a Julius Cæſar; that the one was an Athenian, and the other a Roman; that Cæſar was famous for ſubduing the world, and Socrates for a much nobler conqueſt, the ſubjection of his paſſions to the laws of virtue. We are as well ſatisfied that theſe men once exiſted, as that we now exiſt ourſelves. We reaſon upon the actions of this philoſopher, and this warrior, as if no man doubted that they lived in their reſpective places, and at their reſpective periods. And if any man ſhould call their exiſtence in queſtion, we ſhould certainly laugh at

his

his hiſtorical ſcepticiſm; we ſhould pronounce him either extremely weak, or deprived of his ſenſes.

The good Chriſtian proceeds with the ſame aſſurance in matters of religion. He is ſenſible, that, if the facts recorded in the Old and New Teſtament are more extraordinary than the events of common hiſtory, they are aſcertained by proofs proportionate to their weight, and unuſual occurrence. His mind is not entangled in the cobwebs of philoſophy, --- in the utility of virtue, --- in a moral ſenſe; --- in the fitneſs of things; --- pompous, but vague ſounds; --- certainly not calculated to induce the generality of mankind to lead a good life; and but ill calculated for thoſe ſentimental, and ethereal geniuſes, who were ſo prodigal of theſe trite, ſyſtematic phraſes, if we may judge of the efficacy of their motives to virtue by their moral conduct. The life of the true Chriſtian is regulated by a ſurer, and a ſublimer guide; by the precepts of the goſpel; precepts ſo perſpicuous, that they are adapted to the meaneſt underſtanding; --- precepts ſo agreeable to the genuine feelings of mankind, that the heart gives them its ſuffrage by melting while it reads them; --- precepts, the moſt complete that could be delivered, for they raiſe human nature to the higheſt perfection of which it is capable. Thus firmly, and on this foundation is the

faith of the Chriſtian eſtabliſhed. And the integrity, and purity of his life, flow as naturally, and neceſſarily from his vigorous, religious belief, as the reflexions of the moraliſt, or politician on the death of Socrates, or Cæſar, from their certainty, that the one was poiſoned at Athens, and the other ſtabbed in the Roman ſenate.

Let us not be deceived by vain pretences. It is not a ſuperiority of underſtanding, but a depravity of heart which makes the infidel. When a man of eminent talents, and one, who, perhaps by mere prudence, and very partial virtue, hath always maintained a fair character, employs his abilities in undermining religion, depend upon it, he is actuated by ſome low motive, by ſome latent paſſion, which hath made Chriſtianity, and him diſagree;--- by intereſt, probably, or vanity, or both. He may, indeed pretend that he means to aſſert the rights, and rational liberty of mankind, though he addreſſes himſelf to a free community, where religion impoſes only thoſe reſtrictions, by which every truly ſenſible and virtuous man would wiſh always to be bound. He may pretend that he is a friend to the Britiſh conſtitution, to the peace, and happineſs of his country, while he endeavours to make the religion contemptible, which is eſtabliſhed in it by its laws, and

which is the people's beſt pledge of their reverence to God, and their loyalty to their Sovereign. He may pretend that it has been his aim to cheer, and recreate the heart of man, while he hath uſed his utmoſt efforts to rob us of the beſt conſolations that can be afforded us in this tranſitory, and unfortunate life. --- All this he may pretend; but what good man who can reflect as well as he, will believe him?

We have reaſon to thank heaven for its peculiar bleſſing to this country, which has produced ſome of the greateſt men in point of genius the world ever ſaw, who have exerted their eminent talents in the ſtrenuous defence of revelation. Their writings may inform the ableſt head; and the memory of their examples may warm the coldeſt heart with the love of virtue, and piety. I ſpeak not of the luminaries of our church, who have been ſuch eminent patrons of the Chriſtian cauſe, and the tenour of whoſe lives hath evinced that they would have ſcorned to impoſe upon mankind. --- I ſpeak not of *them*, becauſe the unreflecting croud, who are more able to accuſe, than to think, and argue, are always ready to aſſert, that their works were dictated by prieſt-craft, and hypocriſy. I allude to the ornaments of our laity. Senſibility is rouzed at the re-

membrance of their names: --- and their names I would now oppoſe to the writers on the other ſide of the queſtion, for the honour of Chriſtianity, were I not loth to betray the appearance of pedantry, and oſtentation.

Notwithſtanding the diſſipation of the times, it is ſomewhat ſurprizing that our faſhionable gentlemen are not oftener checked in their career of libertiniſm by calling to mind the tenets, and virtues of thoſe reſpectable, and great men. For their names, and characters they undoubtedly have heard, though they have never had application enough to read their works. It is odd that they ſhould be ſo callous to matters of ſuch conſequence, on which, for aught that they can urge to the contrary, their preſent, and future happineſs may depend. It is odd, that, inſtead of taxing a believer with weakneſs, and credulity, they do not bluſh for their own want of underſtanding, and ſuperficiality, and reproach themſelves for their negligence, and precipitancy in ſome ſilent hour. --- "I am afraid I am "wrong: I ſhould certainly ſit down to think, and "ſearch the ſcriptures. For I totally differ from "thoſe who have been univerſally eſteemed, and ad-"mired, both in my opinions, and in my conduct."

Hence

Hence we ſee the reaſon, why ſo high a value is ſet upon faith, and why it is ſo repeatedly inculcated in ſcripture. Mere ſpeculative faith is of no conſequence; and if we are ſatisfied of religious truth, our actions muſt be agreeable to our conviction; our faith muſt be productive of good works. Infidelity is a ſtrong ſymptom of ſome radical immorality of heart. We cavil not at the ſcriptures from our natural incredulity, but from the fatal effects of our paſſions, and bad habits, which indiſpoſe us from receiving religious impreſſions, and dim the opticks of the mind. No thinking man, who has well weighed his faith, who can give a good account of it, ever attempts to get rid of it, till he finds his practices, and propenſities inconſiſtent with it, till he is tortured with a ſervice divided between God, and Mammon. If the intelligent, the virtuous, and heroic Socrates had been our Saviour's cotemporary, and had gone to viſit him at Jeruſalem, there is no doubt but he would have embraced Chriſtianity; for that modeſt, and penetrating ſage complained that mankind wanted a maſter ſuperiour to him, to teach them the perfection of virtue. If an honeſt, and ſenſible perſon, whoſe mind has been infected by the contagion of cuſtom, and miſled by the noiſy echoes of infidelity, on finding our faſhionable pleaſures, what they really are, unſatisfactory,

and

and unworthy of the attachment of a rational creature, ſeizes the happy hour of cool reflexion, and reſolves to model the reſt of his life by the rules of Chriſtianity; let him not be diſcouraged at the beginning of his good courſe, if he ſometimes is bewildered in his faith, and ſtaggers in his conduct. His way will be more diſtinct, and ſmooth, his proſpect will brighten as he goes on. It is the property of perſeverance in well-doing, not only to make rectitude of conduct eaſy to us by the power of habit, but likewiſe to diſpell the miſts of error, to correct, and improve our judgment, to invigorate our religious faith, and thus to increaſe our ardour for virtue, by giving us, from time to time, more repeated, and ſolemn aſſurances of the certainty of her rewards.

As he makes a greater progreſs in rational piety, the more he will be ſatisfied of the truth of revelation, not only by examining revelation itſelf, but by obſerving the diſpenſations of Providence in the preſent world. The beſt men may undergo very ſevere hardſhips in their mortal ſtate of exiſtence; but Providence, without doubt, is, in general, an indulgent father to the good man, even here below. His enjoyment, indeed, is not ſo obvious as it is real; for his pleaſures are chiefly within himſelf; they

catch

catch not the public eye. The majority of men are infatuated with glitter, and ſenſuality; therefore his happineſs will often eſcape their notice; of which happineſs, even when they remark it, they muſt form a very inadequate conception.

Hope is a concomitant of faith in the text; and it is its inſeparable concomitant in the minds of the faithful. If we believe that we ſhall obtain any object which we deſire, our hope that we ſhall obtain it, muſt be proportionate to our belief. Faith is the aſſent of our judgment to the authority of the goſpel; hope is a warm expectation of future good, reſulting from that aſſent, a proſpect of the happineſs which the goſpel propoſes, only ſo far ſhort of aſſurance as is requiſite to make virtue of piety. To be tenacious of religious conduct, in conſequence of palpable, and indiſputable demonſtration, would have little more merit than to infer a corollary from a mathematical propoſition. It would be prudent, but not magnanimous; it would not ſhow that generous ardour for purity of morals, that noble, and unremitting fortitude, which adorn the character of a Chriſtian. Faith, in ſhort, is the ſtem, and hope is the bloſſom: faith, and hope are of mutual aſſiſtance to each other. Faith ſupplies hope; and hope actuates, and enlivens faith; makes it a cheerful, and a pleaſurable object.

Permit me to illuſtrate the genuine effects of a religious faith, and hope, by an inſtance taken from our conduct in the common affairs of life.

When a man expects to be the heir of a wealthy perſon, how careful is he to avoid giving him offence! how induſtrious is he to oblige, and gratify him, though with great inconvenience, and pain to himſelf! What a diligent ſcholar he is! How ſtudious to adopt the ſentiments, and manners of him whom he thinks it ſo much his intereſt to pleaſe! With what attention and reverence does he hang upon his words as if each of them was oracular of his fate! How emulous he is to intercept from his competitors the deciſive title to the golden reverſion!

And ought we not to pay more regard to the will of our heavenly Father than to the caprice of a weak mortal like ourſelves? --- of that Father who created the univerſe, and who gave us not laws with the blindneſs, and rigour of a deſpotic lord, but becauſe thoſe laws were moſt conducive to the welfare of our being? ---- That Father, whoſe will, if complied with, bids faireſt to make us happy in *this*, but will certainly make us happy for ever in the *eternal* world? We ſhould not heſitate to make our *conduct* anſwer in the affirmative, if we had a taſte for thoſe pleaſure

pleaſures which are adapted to our rational, and immortal nature.

It is only the depravity of our lives which makes religion difficult, and painful; for *her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.* Prov. iii. 17. It is eaſier to render ourſelves acceptable to God, than to gratify the fantaſtic, and extravagant humours of a rich man; the advantages of the former ſervice are far more to be depended upon than thoſe of the latter; and the value of them is ſo vaſtly ſuperiour, that it riſes above compariſon.

But I muſt now take a view of charity: and I enter upon the ſurvey of it with particular pleaſure; for St. Paul hath pronounced that it is the greateſt of the three.

The word, *charity*, occurs frequently in the epiſtles of the new Teſtament; and as often as it occurs, the original word, for which it is uſed, is αγαπη; which ſignifies, Love; a ſtrong, habitual diſpoſition, an unwearied diligence to promote the welfare, and happineſs of our fellow-creatures.

Now, though charity, in the Engliſh language admits of this extenſive ſignification, yet it has like-

wiſe a more limited meaning, which is reſtrained to our liberality to the poor, or to the alms which we give them. And it is to be feared that many profeſſors of Chriſtianity have bounded their charity to mankind by this partial interpretation of the word. But, if theſe men could thînk that *their* cold, and occaſional charity, was the charity which God required of them, they muſt have been unpardonably inattentive to the ſtrain of the Chriſtian diſpenſation; they muſt have formed the moſt narrow, defective notions of their duty as moral agents, and the moſt unworthy, irreverent idea of the nature of the Supreme Being.

They profanely degraded their Maker into a feudal Lord, and themſelves into ignoble vaſſals, who held of him by a baſe tenure. The payment of a pecuniary tribute, they fancied, would be a ſufficient ſubſtitute for the obſervance of the firſt, and great commandment, for *loving the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their ſoul, and with all their mind.* For, if ſuch had been their attachment t*him*, they would, conſequently, have obeyed th ſecond, which is like unto it; they would hav *loved their neighbour as themſelves.* Matth. chap. xxi 37, 38, 39.

Th

The meaning of the word, *charity*, in ſcripture, will be beſt determined by a few quotations from ſcripture.

We learn from St. Paul, that we may ſacrifice a great deal both to God, and man, and yet be deſtitute of charity. *Though I beſtow*, ſays he, *all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* 1 Cor. xiii. 3. What eminence is here aſcribed to charity! We may have the fortitude of a martyr; we may give up all our poſſeſſions to relieve the neceſſitous, and yet we may be inferiour to the charitable man! But it is no wonder that he honours charity ſo highly; for in the following verſes he gives it a very extenſive walk. *Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itſelf; is not puffed up; doth not behave itſelf unſeemly; ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil; --- rejoiceth not in iniquity; but rejoiceth in the truth; --- beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* Ver. 4, 5, 6, 7. We have a remarkable injunction from St. Peter: *Add*, ſays he, *to your brotherly kindneſs, charity*, 2 Eph. i. 7. What then muſt brotherly kindneſs, and what muſt charity mean? Brotherly kindneſs muſt ſignify a ſocial harmony; a reciprocation of civility, and good offices.

But charity muſt be a more ardent, and forcible principle; a principle more diffuſive, and therefore more operative upon our minds. Charity is, to have a tender concern for all mankind; to omit no opportunity of ſerving our fellow-creatures; and to ſerve them to the utmoſt of our power; to ſympathize with that miſery which we cannot relieve; and to rejoice with that proſperity which we do not confer.

By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, ſays our bleſſed Saviour, *if ye have love one to another.* John xiii. 35. Here, you ſee, Chriſt makes charity the ſubſtance of his religion, the leading characteriſtick of his followers. It is, indeed, a teſt of Chriſtianity, of all others, the moſt expreſſive of his precepts, and of his life.

And his memorable ejaculation for his inhuman murderers, when he was expiring on the croſs, is, I hope, deeply imprinted in the minds of us all. The keeneſt agony, the moſt exaſperating inſults could not weaken his charity; he retained it in all its vigour, when it probably would have been totally extinguiſhed in the breaſt of the greateſt *human* philoſopher that ever lived. This aſtoniſhing inſtance of his benevolence is a proof of his divinity: ſuch

an inſtance could only have been given us by the Son of God.

There are many religions which leave practical morality almoſt out of the queſtion; which inſiſt principally on the obſervance of external worſhip; and of ſome local, momentary, and trivial acts of humanity. But there is not the leaſt room for this objection againſt Chriſtianity. Our Saviour, and his apoſtles have on every occaſion laid ſuch a peculiar ſtreſs upon good works, upon that active religion which is ſo ornamental to the poſſeſſor, and ſo beneficial to mankind, that, if we omit the practice of it, we muſt be charged with incorrigible diſpoſitions; we cannot plead a want of the plaineſt, and fulleſt information. By a punctuality in attending the ſervice of the church; by kneeling at the publick prayers, and bowing at the name of the Meſſiah; by frequently giving a halfpenny to an object of diſtreſs; nay, ſometimes even a ſixpence, we may, it is true, ſave appearances with the world; for the world, in general, carry their religion no farther: and a man will hardly preſume to exact from his neighbour a more elevated piety than that to which he aſpires himſelf. But this is not the ſpirit of the goſpel; we *know* it is not; it will not acquit us at the tribunal of conſcience, nor at the more awful tribunal of God. Theſe

Theſe mechanical worſhippers of the Deity are exactly in the predicament of the old Jews, reproved with ſuch warmth, and eloquence, by Iſaiah, who no leſs deſerves the title of the evangelical prophet, for the ſublimity of his doctrine, than for his exact prefigurations of the Meſſiah. --- *Bring no more vain oblations; incenſe is an abomination to me; the new moons, and ſabbaths, the calling of aſſemblies I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the ſolemn meeting.* --- *Waſh ye; make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil;* --- *learn to do well; ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow.* Iſaiah i. 13, 16, 17.

But the truly charitable man adopts into his life that univerſal, and vigorous benevolence, which is ſo repeatedly, and earneſtly inculcated in ſcripture. He thinks the decent and becoming forms of religion acceptable to God, and reſpectable by man, only as means productive of noble ends; as they collect our attention to worthy objects, which is apt to be diſſipated, and loſt, amidſt the trifles, and temptations of life; as they keep alive, and ſtrengthen the pure and generous flame of charity, which he looks upon to be the eſſence of our religion, becauſe it is ſo warmly enforced in the New Teſtament, and ſo con-

ducive

ducive to the happineſs of man. We ſhall ſuppoſe him, a man of affluence, that we may ſee the full exertion of benevolence.

There are many who part with a little money now and then to the poor, the want of which they cannot feel; nay, perhaps they do more; perhaps they cloath a few boys and girls in their neighbourhood; for this charity makes a plauſible ſhew; it is the livery of their beneficence. Yet theſe people, with all their munificence, will ſee their honeſt tenant ſtruggling with the hardſhips of an oppreſſive farm, and not commiſerate his ſituation; nay, they will thank the unfeeling ſteward, who raiſes his rent, and completes his ruin.

Others, whoſe avarice would not allow them to do one generous action while they lived, bequeath, at their death, great ſums to publick hoſpitals. As if they were to pleaſe God; as if they deſerved to be thanked by men, for parting with that which they could hold no longer.

This is not the ſyſtem of *our* charitable man. His heart is fraught with humanity, and compaſſion: therefore he likes to be employed in doing good; in doing it himſelf; in his own perſon; not by indolent, or oſtentatious deputation. Yet, though he

ſounds not a trumpet before him, like the hypocrites, he is not aſhamed of his acts of charity; he puts not his candle under a buſhel, like thoſe weak people, who mark the * letter, but weigh not the meaning of the ſcriptures. The relief of honeſt, neceſſitous families is his favourite object; of thoſe who retain their induſtry, their integrity, and reſignation under the preſſure of want. He is the kind, and beneficent patron of the hoary, deſerted widow. He viſits her in her humble cottage; his heart glows, and dilates as he enters it. He ſhows, by his manner of ſupplying her neceſſities, that he is as happy in giving, as ſhe can be in receiving. He gently ſounds the ſtate of her mind; he gives her that advice, and conſolation, which are equivalent to his preſent, --- "Be "comforted," ſays he, "my good woman; I am "thy father, thy huſband, and thy ſon."--- The tear of his ſympathy heals her heart as much as the liberality of his purſe.

He is not laviſh, and undiſtinguiſhing in the diſtribution of his charity: he endeavours to know the characters of thoſe whom he aſſiſts: and the worthieſt of his objects is ſure to have his largeſt donations. But he thinks it his duty to relieve the moſt wicked

* "When thou doeſt alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth." Matt. vi. 3.

wicked perſon, when he is in ſevere diſtreſs. He thinks he is ſufficiently puniſhed by the conſequences of his vices; and if *he* is inſtrumental in mitigating his puniſhment, he thinks he acts agreeably to God's government of the world, who maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil, and on the good, and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt. If we view the crimes of the needy profligate in all their deformity, but exclude his miſery from our imagination, we *may* ſpare our money; but we ſhall wound our charity.

This humble imitation of God, who is the God of lenity, and univerſal love, makes him equally ready to do good offices to his bittereſt enemies when they ſtand in need of them. It is eaſier for the virtuous man to forgive his enemies than is commonly imagined. They can ſeldom do him much injury in this world; and they have no power over his future intereſt, the great object of his care. Now where little hurt is inflicted, little reſentment can ariſe. Why do we harbour violent, and implacable reſentment? Becauſe we cannot bear the privation of ſome inſignificant externals; becauſe we cannot bear an oppoſition to our ungoverned paſſions. The charitable, and conſequently, the modeſt and humble man, when he is attacked by malevolence, ſuppreſſes any vindictive emotion, in its birth; though, in fact, vin-

dictive emotions, are, in general, ſtrangers to his breaſt. But the contrivances of the proud man's enemies have their full effects upon him; he gives them all their conſequence. He is tormented with them; he ſhows that he is tormented, by his induſtry to retaliate. The world, and his enemies are witneſſes of his pain, and they laugh at him for his puſillanimity. Which of theſe two men act with more dignity, and ſpirit? It is a groſs abſurdity juſtly entailed upon pride, that it counteracts its own purpoſe: it would always appear great, and it always appears contemptible.

The benevolence of the charitable man is not reſtrained by a difference of nation, or religion; he thinks that the diſcriminating moral characters of the countries of Europe are as much affixed by prejudice, as by juſtice; and that good men of every ſect and form are ſubſtantially of the ſame perſuaſion.

He is far from reſtraining his charity to pecuniary liberality; his charity gives a benevolent tone to his whole conduct. Charity is the touchſtone by which he tries his language, and his actions. He will not utter an idle, and unneceſſary word that may be hurtful to his neighbour. He will not indulge an inclination,

tion, the indulgence of which would bring detriment to another. He looks upon the man to be highly uncharitable, who, though liberal of his money to thoſe who want it, will not ſcruple to be guilty of an injury to his fellow-creature, to gratify himſelf; an injury, perhaps, for which no ſum can compenſate. He is as careful to avoid doing the leaſt evil, as he is ſtrenuous to do all poſſible good.

He will not ſhake off an acquaintance for his irregularities ſo ſoon as he is generally diſcarded by the narrow ſpirit of ſociety. He ſtudies the ſprings of human nature, as well as the written law of God, and finds them exactly coincident. He knows that many very wide aberrations from moral rectitude have often preceded the moſt determined, and heroic virtue; and that many ingenuous minds have been conſigned to deſpair, and confirmed wickedneſs, by the untimely frowns of undiſtinguiſhing and barbarous pretenders to charity, and chriſtianity.

He is a curious enquirer after merit of every kind; he ſeeks it in its moſt latent receſſes; he gives it all the encouragement he can; he brings it forth to publick view. For merit ſtands in great need of patronage; it is often the child of penury, and penury reſtrains its growth.

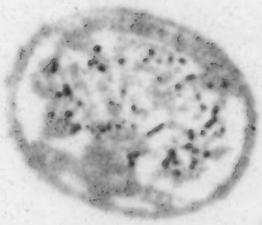
As he values no man merely for his wealth, he ſcorns to pay wealth any prepoſterous homage. If two worthy men are in his company, the one rich, and the other poor, he pays more attention, and deference to the poor than to the rich man. For worth in adverſity, is diffident, and timid, is apt to think too meanly of itſelf. But wealth gives confidence, and ſecurity; and unleſs it reſides with worth equal to that of the charitable man, is apt to arrogate more than is its due. Yet he behaves with civility even to a rich, and profligate lord; but this is the greateſt trial that ever his charity undergoes.

He takes into the account of charity what is often left out of it by very benevolent, and humane people. He thinks it his duty, as a charitable man, to obſerve the rules of temperance, and to keep all ſenſuality under the ſtricteſt government. For he thinks he could not give way to any animal exceſs, without contracting a ſelfiſhneſs, and depravity of mind, without interrupting the great buſineſs of charity, without encroaching upon his golden law.

My time hath obliged me to give you rather a ſketch than a picture of this godlike man; but I hope it is diſtinct, and comprehenſive enough to ſhow you his true features; and to evince the juſtneſs o

St. Paul's aſſertion, that charity is the greateſt of the three chriſtian virtues mentioned in the text. If, indeed, this charity hath its full influence upon our hearts, and conduct, we *muſt* have a firm faith, and we *muſt* cheriſh a well-grounded hope. But if we neglect to cultivate this amiable diſpoſition; or if we ſtint the cultivation of it by prejudices, paſſions, and bad habits; our faith will be of detriment, not of advantage to us; it will be our accuſer, and our enemy; and our hope will be our preſumption.

What a new ſcene would the world be, if chriſtian charity was reduced to general practice! We ſhould ſee little of that great quantity of phyſical, and moral evil which imbitters human life, and which ſome men are ſo bold and profane as to charge upon the Deity, while we ourſelves are to blame for it, by our inattention to reaſon, and our diſobedience to religion. If univerſal benevolence was univerſally practiced in all its force and latitude, the ſtate of the world might be repreſented by part of St. John's deſcription of the New Jeruſalem, with little exaggeration. All tears would be wiped away from our eyes, and there would be no more ſorrow, nor crying, neither would there be any more pain. Rev. xxi. 4. --- But though we cannot hope for this general diffuſion of chriſtian charity, when we conſider the preſent

ſent diſpoſitions of mankind, yet let it be remembered that it is in the power of every individual to acquire it. --- That all we who are here may practiſe charity, which is a term ſynonymous with Chriſtianity, may God of his infinite mercy grant, for the ſake of thoſe with whom we are, or may, or ought to be connected: to whom be aſcribed all honour, might, majeſty, and dominion, now, and for ever, Amen!

FINIS.